

# Help Your Patients Who Speak Limited English

Over 8% of people in the US have **limited English proficiency (LEP)**.

These LEP populations face many challenges, such as lack of healthcare access and reduced health literacy...which can lead to misinformation, med adherence issues, and vaccine hesitancy.

Share these tips with your team when communicating with patients who are LEP.

**Interpreting.** First determine what language the patient speaks...simply by asking or using language identification cards.

Know your pharmacy's language-assistance policies. Many have access to telephone services that can interpret 100 or more languages.

When using an interpreter, speak directly to the patient...not the interpreter. This shows you're giving the patient your full attention.

Don't rely on family and friends to interpret. Serious errors can occur when certain info is omitted, added, or substituted.

**Understanding.** Follow your pharmacy's policies for gathering patient info...even if communication is difficult. Ask for patient name, date of birth, etc...to help ensure the right patient receives the right drug.

Avoid asking "yes" and "no" questions. Some patients will nod or say "yes" just to be polite...when they really don't understand what you're saying. Stick with asking open-ended questions.

Do a "chunk and check." Give the patient portions of info at a time...then assess their understanding and fill in gaps as needed.

Consider using pictograms to help get the message across visually.

**Labeling.** If your computer system allows, print out Rx labels and drug info leaflets in the patient's language.

Stay alert for words that can easily be misinterpreted. For example, "once" means "eleven" in Spanish...and it could cause big problems if a patient takes a medication, such as warfarin, eleven times a day instead of just once a day.

Unpack our toolbox, *Overcoming Patient Communication Challenges*. And check out our CE on communicating effectively with patients.

## Key References:

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- The Joint Commission: Advancing Effective Communication, Cultural Competence, and Patient and Family-Centered Care: A Roadmap for Hospitals. 2010. <https://www.jointcommission.org/-/media/tjc/documents/resources/patient-safety-topics/health-equity/roadmapforhospitalsfinalversion727pdf.pdf> (Accessed August 10, 2024).

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